

The Direction Debate: Razi vs Ibn Taymiyyah

Part I of Razi's 'Foundation of Sanctification', along with a representative selection of Ibn Taymiyyah's responses.

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Introduction

In 1988 CE / 1408 H, a young Salafi theologian named Usama al-Qassas was killed in the streets of Tripoli, Lebanon. Rumors among the public have it that his body was hacked into pieces, and the word *kafir* (unbeliever) written on his forehead. The 24-year old's damning crime, in the eyes of his killers (generally held to be from a fringe element of radical Ash`ari Sufis), was that he wrote a book entitled, "Establishing the highness of the Merciful [God] by means of Pharaoh's words to Haman," the ostensible attribution of direction to God being anathema to many Ash`aris.

The issue of whether God can be described by direction is arguably the most prominent specific case of the more general dispute over figurative interpretation of potentially anthropomorphic verses and hadith. This dispute, in turn, is one of a handful of issues of contention between the Hanbalites and Ash`arites<sup>1</sup>, and in particular is one of the prominent charges of heterodoxy levelled against the Hanbalite theologian Ibn Taymiyyah<sup>2</sup>. With Ibn Taymiyyah having strongly influenced Ibn `Abdil-Wahhab, whose sub-school in turn has risen to prominence with the rise of the modern Saudi kingdom, this dispute is still very much alive³, as is gruesomely highlighted by the killing of Usamah al-Qassas.

Fakhr al-Din Razi's *Asas al-Taqdis* (The Foundation of Sanctification) could arguably be considered as archetypal of the high point of the late Ash`arite school. A significant portion of

¹ Others include: the permissibility of *kalam*, the nature of God's speech, the relationship between divine will and human will, and the first obligation on the sane adult. See: Hawali's dissertation *Manhaj al-Asha`irah f al-`Aqidah*.

² For example, Ibn Hajar al-Haytami (d. 974H / 1566 CE), in his *al-Fatawa al-Hadithiyyah*, after listing a long list of purported charges of heterodoxy against Ibn Taymiyyah, comments, "One who perused his books did not attribute most of these [objectionable] issues to him, except [for the charge] that he proclaims direction [for God], and [that] he has a book [devoted to] affirming it." [FH, 4]

³ The most prominent medieval works on the subject undoubtedly include Ibn Taymiyyah's *Bayan Talbis al-Jahmiyyah* (the work examined in this paper), and a couple of the works of his students: al-Dhahabi's *al-Uluww lil-`Aliyy al-Ghaffar* and Ibn al-Qayyim's *Ijtima` al-Juyush al-Islamiyyah `ala Ghazw al-Mu`attilah al-Jahmiyyah*.

Among the 20th century works on the issue are the following:

In support of the "Hanbalite" position: `Abdullah Sabt's *Al-Rahman `ala al-`Arsh Istawa*, Salim Hilali's *Ayna Allah?* and Usamah Qassas' *Ithbat `Uluww al-Rahman*.

In support of the dominant Ash`arite position: Sa`id Fudah's *Husn al-Muhajjah fi Bayan ann Allah Ta`ala la Dakhil al-`Alam wa-la Kharijah* and Hasan Saqqaf's *Tanqih al-Fuhum al-`Aliyah bi-ma Thabat wa-ma lam yathbut fi Hadith al-Jariyah*.

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the book discusses precisely the issue introduced above. The following is an outline of the book's contents:

Outline of Razi's *Asas al-Taqdis*

I – The Evidences that God Transcendent above Corporeality

- 1- Establishing the Preliminaries
- 2- Establishing the textual evidences that God is transcendent above corporealism (10 proofs)
- 3- Erection of the rational evidences that God is not spatially confined. (6 proofs)
- 4- Erection of the proofs that God is not restricted to a spatial location and direction (8 proofs)
- 5- Relating the rational confusions concerning God's being particularly in a spatial location and direction (based on 4 preliminaries)
- 6- That the famous position of the ancient Karramites is to apply the word "body" to God.

II – [Figurative] interpretation of the Mutashabihat (prologue and 32 sections)

III – An account of the way of the Forbears (salaf)

IV – Leftovers

- 1- The verdict on mentioning the *mutashabihat*
- 2- Can a corporealist (*mujassim*) be described as an assimilationist (*mushabbih*)?
- 3- Concerning excommunication⁴ of someone who claims God is a body spatially located in a specific direction.

Much of the content is, as I have already mentioned, at clear variance with certain traditionist / Hanbalite views, and Part I of the book became the subject of a lengthy refutation - *Bayan Talbis al-Jahmiyyah* (An Exposition of the Delusion employed by the Jahmites⁵) - over a century later by Ibn Taymiyyah. The broad scope and detail⁶ of Ibn Taymiyyah's book lend credence to a claim made by the editor (Qasim) that the work ranks among Ibn Taymiyyah's

⁴ It is worth noting that although Ibn Taymiyyah he sees himself as excommunicated by Razi, he still regards Razi as a Muslim [see BTJ, 1/300 and elsewhere]. He even clears him of charges of sorcery and idolatry [BTJ, 1/123]. For more on Ibn Taymiyyah's fairness and moderation in excommunicating others, see Makdisi's exposition of Ibn Taymiyyah's concept of orthodoxy [HI, 257-262]. Also al-Mish'abi's published dissertation, *Manhaj Ibn Taymiyyah fi Mas'alat al-Takfir*.

⁵ "Jahmi" here (and commonly among Hanbalis) is a pejorative term for those who figuratively interpret potentially anthropomorphic descriptions of God. This usage goes back to at least the 3rd century Hijri. See: See: Gimaret, DIDH, 28.

⁶ Although the section of Razi's book I have translated is just over 15 pages, Ibn Taymiyyah's response runs close to 400 pages. The arguments themselves are of considerable length, although Ibn Taymiyyah also digresses at times into extended expositions of tangential issues, such as pantheism [1/71, 1/210-213], seeing God in a dream [1/73], refutation of pre-eternity of the universe [1/141 -197] and of pre-eternity of the 'Arsh, and of time [1/153], arguments for the existence of God [1/172-181], divine purpose, wisdom and will [1/197], positive mention of Sufis [1/237, 260], affirmation of Heaven and Hell both being absolutely without end [1/157], definitions of time: [1/296], re-examining conventional stereotypes of the Barahimah [1/318-322] and of Sophists [322-325].

major works or masterpieces. Its importance is perhaps enhanced still further by the fact that Ibn Taymiyyah addresses in it numerous issues on which he has been charged of contradicting orthodox doctrine.⁷

In what follows, I begin by presenting a translation of the first section of Part I of Razi's book. In the footnotes, I have included a selection of Ibn Taymiyyah's responses.⁸

Synopsis of the Debate

Before turning to Razi and Ibn Taymiyyah themselves, it may be useful to present a synopsis of their arguments.

Razi's Argument

In the section at hand of the *Foundation of Sanctification*, Razi has set about adducing rational evidences for God being neither within the universe nor outside of it. For Razi, this is a necessary consequence of the incontrovertible rational truth that God is not a corporeal being. Razi acknowledges that we are incapable of fathoming a being neither in the universe nor outside of it, but that nevertheless claims it is a false dilemma to argue that God must therefore be either in the universe or outside of it. In order to justify this line of argument, he points out that a tripartite enumeration of possibilities here is rationally conceivable. He argues that it is not inconceivable for an existent being to be 'neither inside nor outside,' just as we can accept pure intelligibles as existing without location. Furthermore, he proffers that the quiddity of something can be intellectually grasped without having to attribute it to a direction, and moreover that the incapacity to imagine something does not rule out its existence, for everyone agrees that there exist things that are outside of both sensory perception and imagination such as the phenomena of *ex nihilo* creation, the beginning of time, or God doing things without tools or fatigue. Razi also draws a parallel between those who attribute direction to God, and the proponents of pre-eternity of time (*dahriyyah*). Logically speaking, Razi says, each should embrace the other's view in order to remain consistent, yet neither would accept this. He stresses that something need not have an analogue or likeness in order to justify its existence. Finally, he presents a synopsis of the disagreements among those who attribute direction to God.

Ibn Taymiyyah's Response

Ibn Taymiyyah claims that we are not only incapable of grasping a being that is "neither inside nor outside", but that it is impossible for such a being to exist. The fact that some other non-imaginable things are possible does not prove the issue at hand to be so. Razi's supporting arguments of God not being corporeal, nor confined in space, are in fact also upheld by Ibn

⁷ Issues such as the eternity of Hell and the pre-eternity of the world. For an overview of these issues, albeit a little superficial, see the section devoted to this in 'Ali's SIIT, 510-536.

⁸ The selection is not by any means exhaustive of Ibn Taymiyyah's arguments, and to do them full justice would be a larger endeavor and result in a far lengthier product. I have used my judgment in my selection, omitting not only details but often alternate lines of argument, in the interests of brevity. I am hopeful that what has come out is representative and captures some of the work's major points.

Taymiyyah (along with most of the Hanbalites)⁹ although he maintains that words such as these, which have not appeared in any sacred text, are of ambiguous import and are therefore better left neither affirmed nor negated [1/22, 78]. Ibn Taymiyyah argues that it is essential to realize that God cannot be understood merely as an abstract entity, which is what the philosophers tend to, nor as an unqualified existence, which is the essence of pantheism [1/334]. Rather, every being has a reality distinguishing it, and a limit (*hadd*) and extent (*miqdar*) separating it from other beings [1/342], and the same must be true of God.

It is impossible for there to be in existence a being which does not share in any of the aspects of existence with other beings, nor resembles them in any of these [1/315]. What is existent must necessarily be perceptible in some way to the senses [1/328]¹⁰. The unknown (*majhul*) cannot be the object of cognizance (*la yu`raf*) nor can it be sought (*la yuqsad*) nor worshipped (*la yu`bad*) [1/316]. Yet, neither sense perception, nor conjecture, nor imagination, nor even knowledge or intellect, can grasp God's essence [1/65, 99]

The orthodox Sunnite belief that God is seen, by the believers in the Hereafter, is also adduced by Ibn Taymiyyah in support of his position, on the basis that vision must necessarily take place in a direction and spatial location.¹¹ He further reinforces this by the fact that the Mu`tazilites deny both a direction for God and the beatific vision, and moreover that latter Ash`arites, such as Ghazzali and Razi, who grappled with the two issues, and insisted on negating direction, found themselves compelled to negate the vision in effect [1/360].

The crux of Ibn Taymiyyah's argument is that the sound, innate universal human disposition (*fitrah* = فطرة) provides intuitive and necessary knowledge that God is above the universe, and that the best of Razi's arguments are speculative arguments which do not come close in strength or certainty to that conveyed by the *fitrah*.¹² The various sacred texts associating God with highness are a simultaneous proof, and the figurative interpretations that Razi and his like advance for these are sacrilegious to Ibn Taymiyyah. He sees them as a danger almost

⁹ Hanbalites maintain, "The reality of the Creator is not known to mortals....His essence (*mahiyyah*) cannot be described, nor can His particularity (*kayfiyyah*) be imagined by likeness." [BTJ, 1/64]

¹⁰ "There is not in, external existence, [anything] other than that which can be sensorily indicated...[A]n external being different from this is not rationally comprehensible." [DTAN, 6/16]

¹¹ Interestingly, he once again quotes Ibn Rushd as declaring the same [1/366], and just as interestingly mentions that the Hanbalite Abu Ya`la believed that the beatific vision is without direction [1/359].

¹² On a similar note, Ibn Taymiyyah says elsewhere, "If our view is known by intuition, then it is not [appropriate] to debate it with a speculative argument, because the speculative cannot be used to disparage that which is [known by] necessity, just as the disparagement of the sophist – by his perspective – of what people say is known by intuition, is not accepted. His mere claim against his adversary is not acceptable; rather the recourse in issues of necessary intuition is to those of sound dispositions which have not become changed through inherited beliefs and caprice." [DTAN, 6/14] For a detailed discussion of Ibn Taymiyyah's stance here, see: El-Tobgui, Carl Sharif. "Ibn Taymiyya on the Incoherence of the Theologians' Universal Law: Reframing the Debate between Reason and Revelation in Medieval Islam." *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 18 (2018): 63-85.

equivalent to the esoteric interpretations of the Law by the Carmathians [1/10], and the figurative interpretations of resurrection by the heretic philosophers [1/74, 1/224].

Avicennian Echoes?

With Ibn Taymiyyah's position hinging so centrally on the necessary knowledge provided by *fitrah*, it is intriguing to note that Razi, too, considers this source stronger than speculative arguments.¹³ The difference appears to be that Razi has disregarded the directional aspect of the universal tendency to turn upward to seek God, and has thus affirmed that to "pray and beseech mercy from God" is what is intuitively known through the natural human disposition. This disregard on Razi's part cannot be one of oversight; rather it must certainly be attributed to his view that a directional affirmation would compromise God's transcendence. Perhaps this has its roots in Ibn Sina's concept of intuition (*hads*) as being broader than the *fitrah*.¹⁴ This by itself does not make for a consistent position, for Ibn Sina himself considered the spontaneous intuition of *fitrah* to be stronger than that of rational truths arrived at through reflection.¹⁵ At the same time, we note that Ibn Taymiyyah claims that Ibn Sina was the first philosopher to negate direction from God¹⁶. If Ibn Taymiyyah's insights into the history of philosophy and *kalam* are taken as accurate, then one may tentatively conclude that Razi's position on this is influenced by Ibn Sina's thought.¹⁷ To what extent Razi's ideas are representative of the Ash'arite school over the centuries is another matter, on which I will not expand any further right now.

¹³ See: Abrahamov, 26.

¹⁴ See: Marmura's analysis of Gutas' important work, 336-340.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ See DTAN, 6/19.

¹⁷ Admittedly, to find the true extent of this influence, one would need to trace and study Ibn Sina's discussions on the matter.

Translation of the opening of Razi's "Foundation of Sanctification"

*"Know, therefore, that there is none worthy of worship but God."*¹⁸
[The Noble Qur'an]

In the Name of God, the Source of Mercy, the Bestower of Mercy.

The sheikh and imam, Fakhr al-Din Muhammad ibn `Umar al-Razi – may God cover him with His forgiveness – said:

Praise is to God, Whose existence and enduring are inevitable; Whose changing and passing away are impossible, Whose importance and superiority are tremendous, Whose favor and blessings are universal, Whose oneness is indicated by His earth and His sky. [He is the One] Whose attributes and names are exalted above the faults of likening and denial, so His Mounting is His overcoming and conquest; His Descent is His kindness and His bequest; His coming is His verdict and His judgment; His Countenance is His existence, or His generosity and His gift; His Eye is His protection, His assistance and His selection; His Laughing is His pardon, or His permission and approval; His Hand is His bestowal of favor and honor and His choosing. Nothing comes to pass in the Two Abodes, of His actions, except what He wants and wills. Greatness is His covering and grandeur His cloak.¹⁹

I praise Him for His abundant bounties and His fine generosity. I bear witness that there is none worthy of worship but God alone, without any partner, and I bear witness that Muhammad is His slave and messenger. He sent him with the guidance and the religion of truth, in order that He may make it prevail over all religion, even if the associationists dislike [it]. May God bless him, his household and his companions, and grant them peace abundantly.

As for what follows: Although I am resident in the farthest lands of the east, yet I have found the inhabitants of the east and the west in agreement and accord that the venerated sultan, the just scholar, the striver, the sword of the world and religion, the sultan of Islam and of the Muslims, the most excellent of the sultans of truth and certitude, Abu Bakr ibn Ayyub – may the signs of his banners in strengthening the religion, and genuine way, continue to ascend to the clouds of the sky, and [may] the traces of the lights of his capability and capacity endure commensurate with the alternation of morning and evening – is the most excellent of the kings and the most perfect of the sultans in the signs of virtue and proofs of sincerity [which he possesses], and [in his] strengthening of the correct religion and backing the straight path. I

¹⁸ Qur'an, 47:19.

¹⁹ This statement is taken directly from a hadith, narrated by Muslim. [RS, 1/350] It is interesting to note that Razi makes no attempt to adduce a figurative meaning for this. Perhaps he felt that the immediately preceding statements should be sufficient for establishing that such texts cannot possibly be taken literally. Or, perhaps he is subtly trying to make the point, to his adversaries, that he does accept such texts 'as they are'.

therefore wanted to present him with a grand gift and a pleasing present, and so – despite the remoteness of our homes, and the separation between our lands – I have presented to him this book which I have named, “The Foundation of Sanctification.” I have asked God, the Generous, to benefit him by it in the two abodes, by His grace and generosity.

I have arranged [the book] in four parts:

The First Part: on the evidences which indicate that [God] (Exalted be He!) is transcendent above corporeality and spatial location. It contains [a number of] sections:

The First Section: on establishment of the preliminaries which it is necessary to present before plunging into the evidences, and [these preliminaries] are three:

1. [Claim of existence of a being not perceptible to the senses]

The First Preliminary: Know that we claim the existence of a being to Whom it is not possible to point, as being “here” or “there.” Or, [in other words,] we say: we claim the existence of a being not specific to any of the spatial locations or directions. Or, [in still other words,] we say: we claim the existence of a being neither contained in (حال) the world nor apart (مباين) from it in any of the six directions which the world has. These [three] expressions are [somewhat] different, but the intent of all is one [and the same].

Amongst those who disagree²⁰ are some who claim that the unsoundness of these preliminaries is known by necessity. They say: necessary knowledge²¹ is extant concerning [the fact] that [given] any two beings, one of them must [inevitably] be either contained in the other, or apart from it specific to one of the six directions surrounding it. They say: affirming two beings contrary to these seven categories is invalid by intuitive (بديهية) reason.

Know that if this preliminary [of our opponents] were to be established as being intuitive, it would not be permissible to embark upon mention of the evidences. [This is because] on the assumption of the matter being as they have said, setting out upon inference – of God’s (Exalted be He!) being neither contained in the world nor apart from it by direction – would [entail] invalidation of necessarily known things. Casting aspersions on necessarily known things on account of speculative theories would imply impairment of the root by the branches, which [in turn] necessitates opening both the root and the branches to contestation, which is invalid. Rather [than foolishly arguing thus], it is obligatory for us to explain that this

²⁰ Ibn Taymiyyah’s provides a synopsis of the views of those who have differed with Razi on this matter, and yet do not attribute corporeality to God. He says, “Those who said the Creator (Glorious be He!) is neither a body nor spatially located differ thereafter as to whether He is above the universe, or not above the universe. Many groups said He is above the universe, in fact above the ‘Arsh, and yet he is not a body nor spatially located. This is said by numbers of the Kullabites, the Karramites and the Ash‘arites, and [also by] a number of the followers of the imams among the Hanafites, Malikites, Shafi‘ites and Hanbalites, and the people of hadith and Sufis, and it is this that al-Ash‘ari related from the People of the Sunnah and Community [as being their view]. Some people among them said He is not above the universe, nor is there anything at all above the universe, nor is there anything above the ‘Arsh, and this is the profession of the Jahmites and the Mu‘tazilites, numbers of the latter Ash‘arites, the philosophers who negate [God’s attributes] and the esoteric Carmathians. Or [some say] He is in every location by His essence, as is professed by numbers of their worshippers, theologians, Sufis and general public. Some of them say He is neither within it nor outside of it, neither incarnate in it, nor in any of the locations. These [people] negate both the opposite characteristics from Him, and this is the profession of groups of their theologians and debaters. The first [view] is dominant amongst their general public, and the people of worship, gnosis and verification among them. The second is dominant amongst their debaters, theologians, researchers and analogists. Many of them combine the two views, such that in the course of his speculation and research he professes the negation of both the two opposite characteristics....while in the course of his worship and devotion he professes that He is in every location and that nothing is devoid of Him.” [BTJ, 1/6-7]

²¹ For discussion on necessary knowledge, see Abrahamov. In connection with necessary knowledge, Ibn Taymiyyah mentions an anecdotal story involving Razi as follows: Razi, along with a Mu‘tazilite theologian, were in a state of perplexity, and approached the Sufi scholar Ahmad Khayyūqī (d. 618 H), to ask him about certain knowledge. He replied, “It is things which come to the self and which the self is incapable of rejecting.” They then asked about how to acquire this knowledge, whereupon he directed them to turn away from their worldly preoccupations and to devote themselves to worship and abstinence. Razi declined, saying that he had too many commitments. The Mu‘tazilite entered the instruction of the Sufi, and after a regimen of seclusion and remembrance of God, came out to Razi and declared, “Sir, by God, the truth is nothing but what these Mushabbihah profess!” [BTJ, 1/266]

preliminary is not a self-evident preliminary, in order that this dubiousity be removed. Therefore, we say: What indicates that these preliminaries are not self-evident is [several] aspects:

1.1

The first: that the majority of rational people (جمهور العقلاء) have agreed that [God] (Exalted be He!) is neither spatially located, nor specific to any of the directions, and that [God] (Exalted be He!) neither dwells within the world nor is apart from it in any of the directions. If the unsoundness of these preliminaries were known by intuition, [then] the agreement of the majority of rational people in denying it would be impossible, for it is not admissible for a great aggregation of rational people to agree on denying necessarily known things. To the contrary, we say; the philosophers have agreed on the affirmation of entities that are not spatially located, such as the intellects, souls, and primordial matter (هيولى). In fact, they have claimed that the entity to which every human points by his statement, “I exist,” is neither a body nor corporeal.²² No-one has said that they are, by this claim, deniers of intuitive things. To the contrary, a big group of the Muslims – such as Ma`mar ibn `Abbad al-Sulami of the Mu`tazilites, Muhammad ibn Nu`man of the Rafidites, and Abu'l-Qasim al-Raghib and Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali of our colleagues – have preferred their opinion. If the matter is then such, how is it possible to then say that the belief that God is not spatially located is a belief repudiated by intuitive reason?!²³

1.2

²² Perhaps Razi is drawing on a “thought experiment” described by Ibn Sina, wherein one hypothetically conceives of oneself as being born mature, rational, and suspended in space unaware of corporealism or spatiality. [Marmura, 340-1]

²³ Ibn Taymiyyah’s response is that the widespread agreement, claimed by Razi, does not exist and that, rather, there is a limited agreement which is confined to a group of theologians. This agreement itself, he says, only exists because these people belong to a single school of thought and have blindly accepted its premises and transmitted them to posterity, just as one finds agreement on unsound beliefs amongst the Christians, Rafidites and others. He claims that Ibn Kullab and al-Ash`ari, amongst others, have clarified that existence [of one entity with respect to another] is restricted to the two categories of “apart” (مباين) and “coincident” (محايت).

The deniers [of this] are folk who are sophists when it comes to intellectual evidences, and Carmathians when it comes to scriptural declarations; neither reason nor scripture supports them, and furthermore their incoherence is manifested by the fact that they cannot even agree amongst themselves on the details. They have come to regard their pseudo-proofs (شبه) as conceded axioms. These pseudo-axioms are only open to concession because of the ambiguous way in which they are phrased. For example, their proposal that God is not a body is acceptable according to the lexical meaning of the word (جسم), but not according to the sense in which this term is understood (as an existent being) by the laity according to their natural disposition (فطرة). Hence, to use words such as “body” and “location” – whether by way of affirmation or denial – is heretical.

In summary, the strength of the speculative arguments, advanced by the likes of Razi, falls short of the positive affirmation (جزم) which is firmly established in the natural disposition of humanity. [BTJ, 1/7-11]

The second: that when we present to the intellect [the notion of] the existence of a being which is not within the universe, nor apart from it in any of the six directions, and we also present to the intellect [the facts that] “one” is half of “two,” and that negation and affirmation cannot be present together, we find the intellect to be hesitant about the first proposition, and certain about the second proposition. This disparity is known by necessity, and this indicates that the intellect is not certain about the first premise, neither by way of negation, nor of affirmation. The extent of what [can be said] in this matter is that we find ourselves with an inclination to the view that everything other than the universe must either be within it, or apart from it with direction and spatial location. Nevertheless, we say: since the intellect is not as assertive about this premise as it is about “one” being half of “two,” we come to know that it is not certain that all other than the world must be within it or apart from it with direction; rather, it entertains the possibility of its contrary. Once this has been established, we say: that supposition only came about because of [the fact that] conjecture and imagination (الوهم والخيال) act only in the [realm of] perceptibles, and so it surely is part of their character that they pass judgment on everything according to the rules appropriate to perceptibles. Hence, this inclination only came about on account of conjecture and imagination, and decidedly not on account of the intellect.²⁴

1.3 [The intellect definitely accepts the exhaustive tripartite enumeration of possibilities: within, apart, neither.]

The third: That when we say: a being must either be spatially located, or situated within a spatially located [being], or neither spatially located nor situated within a spatially located [being], we find the intellect certain of the correctness of this partition. If, however, we say that a being is either spatially located or situated within a spatially located [being], and limit ourselves to this extent [of enumeration], we know by necessity that this partition is neither complete nor exhaustive, and that it does not become complete without the addition of a third category, which is that one say, “or, it is neither spatially located nor situated within a spatially located [being].” If the matter be thus, [then] we come to know by necessity that the possibility of this category – that is, the existence of a being that is neither spatially located nor situated in the spatially located – exists in the intellect without repudiation or dispute, and that it is not possible to positively declare either its negation or its affirmation without a separate evidence.²⁵

²⁴ Ibn Taymiyyah’s response is that the reason for the hesitancy is that the meaning of Razi’s proposition is ambiguous, and that were people to understand the meaning of saying that it is possible to classify all beings as either “in” or “apart,” they would affirm this with certainty, just as one would affirm that $55\frac{3}{8}$ is half of $110\frac{3}{4}$, even though they may initially hesitate about both of these. [BTJ, 1/12-13]

²⁵ Ibn Taymiyyah’s response is that establishing this hypothetical enumeration of possibilities does not prove that all the three possibilities actually exist or are possible. As a counter-example, he cites the two categories of “pre-eternal” and “originated,” where none disagree that no third category can possibly exist. He declares that Razi’s argument here is of the same essence as the argument of the Carmathians, whom Razi and his like are therefore unable to successfully debate. [BTJ, 1/14-15]

1.4 [The concept of “humanity” is devoid of a particular form (شكل).]

The fourth: That we know by necessity that human individuals share in the concept of humanity, but vary in their specificities and identities, and that in which there is commonality is other than that by which there is distinction. This implies that one say that humanity in itself is devoid of a specific form. So, humanity in itself is a pure intelligible. Thus, study and investigation has extracted from the perceptible [something] that is a pure intelligible.²⁶ If it be so, then how can it be far-fetched in the intellect that the Creator of the perceptibles be transcendent above the attachments of sense-perception and the associations of the imagination.²⁷

1.5 [We can rationally conceive the quiddity (ماهية) of something while being heedless of its spatial location (حين), form (شكل) and extent (مقدار).]

The fifth: that we might rationally conceive of every quiddity – if we consider it with its boundary and its reality – while we are unaware of the placement and spatial location [thereof]. [Otherwise], how can it be that the human being, at the time that he is immersed in thought, trying to understand what the boundary of knowledge is, or what the boundary of nature is, is heedless of the reality of spatial location and extent, let alone his ruling that this reality [which occupies his thought at that time] must be specific to a location or direction? This implies that it is possible for us to rationally conceive quiddities while being heedless of spatial location, form and extent.

1.6 [Something can be known without knowing its spatial location, form and extent.]

The sixth: and it is that one of us, at the time that he is engrossed in thought and deliberation, in deducing a puzzling issue, might say to himself, “I decide such-and-such,” or “I understand.” So, at the time he is saying to himself, “I understand such-and-such,” and “I decide such-and-such,” he is aware of himself, for were he not aware of himself it would be impossible for him to declare about himself that he decides such-and-such or knows such-and-such.²⁸ Yet, at that time he might be heedless of the meaning of spatial location and direction, and of the meaning

²⁶ Ibn Taymiyyah’s response is that pure intelligibles (universals) cannot be said to exist outside of the mind. In reality, “humanity,” for example, only exists in particularized individual human beings. [BTJ, 1/15] Ibn Sina and others would disagree with him, and Ibn Taymiyyah is not unaware of this, for although he does not mention it here, he does bring it up later on. [BTJ, 1/74, 1/299] Similarly, Ibn Taymiyyah claims that numbers and spatial locations do not have existence. [BTJ, 1/299]

²⁷ Ibn Taymiyyah probes as to whether Razi means that sense-perception cannot encompass God – in which case, he responds that intellect cannot encompass Him either – or whether he means that God cannot be seen nor His speech heard – which is essentially the view of the Mu’tazilites, and which Razi would not agree to explicitly say, although in effect, Ibn Taymiyyah holds, the Ash’arites agree with the Mu’tazilites on this. Ibn Taymiyyah agrees that in this world God cannot be perceived by the senses, but that what the heart experiences and witnesses is broader than sheer intelligibles. Something which cannot be known at all in the realm of sense-perception is effectively non-existent. [BTJ, 1/16-19]

²⁸ Descartes’ later *cogito ergo sum* argument can be clearly seen here. It is worth noting that Kant, after Descartes, in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, would similarly conclude that God is outside the realm of perceptibles.

of form and extent, let alone having knowledge of his self being in a spatial location²⁹, or of his self being characterized by form and extent. It has thus been established that knowledge of something might be attained without having knowledge of its spatial location, form and extent, and this yields certainty that a thing devoid of place and direction can be validly intelligible.

1.7 [It is not necessary that every [existent] thing should be imaginable.]

We see things, except that the faculty of vision does not see itself. Similarly, the imaginative faculty imagines things, except that it is not possible for this faculty to imagine itself. So, the existence of the faculty of sight indicates that it is not necessary that every entity be imaginable, and this opens the door to the possibility mentioned.³⁰

1.8 [Opponents must concede the existence of things outside of sensory perception and imagination.]

²⁹ It is possible that Razi is once again drawing on Ibn Sina's "thought experiment."

³⁰ Ibn Taymiyyah responds to Razi's 5th, 6th and 7th points together with two brief statements:

- i) Razi's opponents say they know that there cannot exist which is neither within the universe nor outside it; they do not say they are incapable or falling short of recognizing such an existence.
- ii) The fact that something else is intelligible does not prove that the issue under contention is also intelligible, and Razi's opponents claim that cannot possibly be intelligible.

The eighth: It is inescapable for our opponents to acknowledge the existence of entities unlike that which the senses and imagination can determine. This is because our opponents in this issue are either the Karramites³¹ or the Hanbalites.³²

As for the Karramites, we say to them, “If God (Exalted be He!) could be pointed to by the senses, then that entity would be either divisible³³ - in which case it is composite (مركب), yet you do not maintain such a view - or indivisible, in which case [the entity] would be like a dot, similar to the indivisible particle, in its smallness and insignificance, yet you do not maintain this view [either]. At this [point in the] discourse, they [shall] say, “He is one, transcendent

³¹ The Karramites are named after Muhammad ibn Karram. Baghdadi describes them as corporealizing their deity as a body with a limit and an extent from beneath, and that in that direction He is in contact with the `Arsh, which is a place for Him, and that He has a weight which will cause the skies to tear on the Day of Judgment. They disagreed as to whether He is the same size as, or bigger than, the `Arsh. They claimed that God is a locus for created things. Faith (إيمان), according to them, was mere affirmation by the tongue. In jurisprudence, Ibn Karram is said to have possessed “idiocies in which none preceded him.” [FBF, 216-223]

Ibn Taymiyyah’s evaluation of them is as follows: “The Karramites, in [the issues] of the [divine] attributes, destiny (قدر) and the [divine] promise and threat, are more agreeable than many of the theologians with their views contradicting the sunnah. However, their profession about faith is [highly] objectionable. The Karramites affirmed the attributes, but said they are accidents (اعراض), and they said [God] is a body unlike bodies. The corporealist Karramites are all Hanafites.” [MF, as cited by Qasim in BTJ, 1/20]

The contents of doxographical works can generally only be accepted with caution. Although Baghdadi appears to base his views, at least partially, on Ibn Karram’s writings, one cannot help but be hesitant about affirming some of the details he mentions. We observe that the renowned King Mahmud ibn Subuktagin followed Karramite beliefs [BN, 12/30], and had the sect been as outrageous as we are led to believe, it is difficult to imagine that the king would have been venerated as much as he is. Similarly, the fact that there was a degree of tolerance between the Karramite and Sunnite Hanafites (as discussed by Lewinstein) suggests that the divergences might not necessarily have been great. There is a paucity of Karramite doctrinal, doxographic and juristic texts, which limits our ability to gain an inside view and more reliable presentation of their positions. While Zysow’s study is welcome and helpful in this regard, it remains to be seen how much more Karramite material will surface.

³² Ibn Taymiyyah takes objection to the views represented by Razi as Hanbalite, declaring that such words have not been transmitted from any of the prominent Hanbalites, and therefore if Razi is veracious then he must be referring to a (fringe-)group of Hanbalites whom he encountered in Khurasan. Similarly, he claims that many Karramites do not espouse the position Razi attributes to them.

Ibn Taymiyyah proffers that those who oppose Razi in this matter are actually not just the two groups he mentions, but rather all of the Prophets, all the Companions and imams of the religion, and in fact all believers of sound natural disposition (فطرة). All of these, he says, affirm (amongst other things), God’s highness and *istiwa’*. In fact, Ibn Taymiyyah submits that even the intelligent among the philosophers disagree with Razi here, going on to quote at length from Ibn Rushd’s arguments against negating the terms “body” and “direction,” at least when addressing the laity. [BTJ, 1/20-21] Elsewhere, Ibn Taymiyyah declares that “All the prophets are in agreement that [God] is in highness. In the Qur’an and sunnah there are close to a thousand evidences for that, and in the words of the former prophets

above composition and combination, yet notwithstanding that He is not small or insignificant.” It is known that this, to which they adhere, is such as is unacceptable to the senses and the imagination. Nay, the intellect, too, will not accept it, for something which is pointed to according to the senses will – if it attains extent in the directions and spatial locations – [be such that] one of its sides is different than the second side, and this necessitates divisibility in the intuitive intellect. If it does not attain extent in any of the directions – neither to the right, nor the left, nor above, nor below – [then] it is an indivisible dot, and it is at the utmost of smallness and insignificance. If it is not too remote, according to them, to adhere to [the notion of] His not being prone to subdivision, and yet being great, unlimited in extent, then this is a combination of negation and affirmation, and [this is] repudiated by the intuition of intellects.

As for the Hanbalites, who adhere to [a doctrine of] parts and pieces³⁴, they also acknowledge that His essence (Exalted be He!) differs from the essences of these perceptibles, for He (Exalted be He!) is not equal to these essences in [their] admitting union, separation, change, extermination, health, illness, life and death. If His essence (Exalted be He!) were equivalent to all other essences in these characteristics, it would necessitate either His being in need of a another creator – which would entail a [recursive] chain-sequence – or else it would necessitate the belief that possibility and origination do not need a creator – which [in turn] would necessitate negation of the Maker. It is thus established that they must inescapably acknowledge that the specificity of His essence, whereby He is distinguished from all other essences, is such that conjecture and imagination cannot reach its quintessence, and this is an acknowledgement of the sureness of a thing different than that which conjecture rules and imagination judges. If the matter is such, then what far-fetchedness is there in the existence of a being neither situated within the universe, nor apart from the universe by direction, even though conjecture and imagination cannot fathom this being.

Further, the mainstay of the Hanbalites’ way is that whenever they hold fast to a [Qur’anic] verse or [Prophetic] report, the apparent sense (ظاهر) of which suggests something of organs

innumerable [evidences].” [JS, 4/318]

³³ Ibn Taymiyyah objects to the word “divisible” as being ambiguous, citing that one might employ Razi’s very reasoning to refute the Ash’arite notion of pre-eternity of the divine attributes. [BTJ, 1/32-33]

³⁴ Ibn Taymiyyah again reiterates that the Hanbalites are not known to affirm parts and pieces for God. Scholarly integrity calls for accurately presenting one’s opponents views. While acknowledging that one can find extreme statements and errors amongst the Hanbalites, Ibn Taymiyyah asserts that the incidence of such is lower amongst them than amongst other schools. The affirmation of textually-known attributes (such as “Hand”) cannot be said to be espousing a doctrine of “pieces and parts,” nor in fact are the Hanabalites alone in affirming these attributes, for al-Ash’ari himself, amongst many others, have done so. He launches into an extended discussion of some of the prominent allegorical texts, as well as texts which some have taken to support the notion that God is a body or has parts. [BTJ, 1/34-54]

and limbs³⁵, they explicitly declare that, “we affirm this meaning for God (Exalted be He!) in a different sense to that in which it is established for creation.” Thus, they affirm for God (Exalted be He!) a Countenance different from the faces of creatures, and a Hand different from the hands of creatures. Yet, it is known that the Hand and the Countenance, with the meanings they have mentioned, are such as the imagination and conjecture cannot accept. So, if it is intelligible to affirm that, [in a manner] differing from conjecture and imagination, then what farfetchedness is there in the statement that He (Exalted be He!) exists, and is neither in the world nor outside the world, even though conjecture and imagination fall short of fathoming this existence.³⁶

1.9 [Parallels between the adherents of *tashbih* and the proponents of pre-eternity of time *dahriyyah*. Logically speaking, each should embrace the other’s view in order to remain consistent, yet neither would accept this.]

The ninth: The adherents of Likening (تشبيه) say, “The world and the Creator are two existent entities, and [for] every two existent entities, either [it is the case that] one of them is situated within the other, or [that] it is apart from it.” They [continue to] say, “The declaration of the necessity of this enumeration is known by necessity.” They say, “The view of incarnation is impossible, so [the matter] devolves to His being apart from the world by direction.” In this manner have they then adduced proof of His being specific to spatial location and direction.³⁷

³⁵ Ibn Taymiyyah comments in another work,

“The word ‘apparent’ has unspecificity and ambiguity. If the one saying [this] believes that the apparent import of them is likening [God’s attributes] to the attributes of created beings or things which are specific to them, then there is no doubt that this sense is not intended. But, the *salaf* and the *imams* used not to call this the apparent sense of [such texts], for they did not approve of [the notion that] the apparent import of the Qur’an and hadith is blasphemy / unbelief (*kufr*) and invalid.” [RT, 47]

³⁶ Ibn Taymiyyah’s response is that they only affirmed what they did because scriptural texts said so, just as they affirm heaven, hell and other unseen things, whereas Razi’s proposition, on the other hand, not only has no explicit text proposing it, but is also contrary to the intuitive natural disposition. Razi *et al* go against the immediate sense of the allegorical texts, on the pretext that only a body can be described as such, but Ibn Taymiyyah proffers that the negation of God being a body is not intuitively known; rather it requires lengthy and obscure proofs. Ibn Taymiyyah is apparently suggesting that if Razi were to go with the stronger indication, he should perhaps adhere to the notion of God being a body rather than what he is proposing. [BTJ, 1/77 and 94]

³⁷ Ibn Taymiyyah’s response is that only some of Razi’s opponents have used this line of reasoning, whereas the majority base their position on the natural disposition, mutually supporting hadith, and consensus of the favored early generations (the *salaf*). [BTJ, 1/110]

The adherents of the pre-eternity of time (دهرية)³⁸ say, “The world and the Creator are two existent entities, and [for] every two existent entities, either [it is the case that] their existence is concurrent, or [that] one of them [comes into being] before the other. But, it is impossible that the world’s and the Creator’s existence be concurrent, otherwise it would necessitate either the pre-eternity of the world or the origination of the Creator, and both are impossible, and so it is established that the Creator is before the world.” Then they say, “Necessary knowledge has been attained that this antecedence can only be by time and interval. Once this has been established, then if the antecedence of the Creator is by a limited interval, it would imply the origination of the Creator, whereas if it is by an interval with no beginning, it would necessitate the interval being pre-eternal.” In this manner have they then deduced the pre-eternity of duration and time.

We then say: The gist of these words is that the Likeners claimed that occurrence of the separateness of the Creator (Exalted be He!) from the world is not intelligible without direction, and they deduced from it God’s being in a direction. The Dahriyyah [on the other hand] claimed that occurrence of the Creator’s antecedence to the world is not intelligible without time, and they deduced from it the pre-eternity of time. Once this has been established, we say: the ruling of the imagination concerning God (Exalted be He!) is either acceptable or not acceptable. If it is acceptable, then the Mushabbihah are compelled to [embrace] the belief of the Dahriyyah, which is that the Creator is antecedent to the world by an unbounded interval of time, and they are compelled to declare that time is pre-eternal³⁹. Yet, the Mushabbihah do not profess this. The Dahriyyah [for their part] would be compelled to [embrace] the belief of the Mushabbihah, which is [that of] separateness of the Creator from the world by direction and location, such that they would be compelled to declare the Creator

³⁸ The term Dahriyyah is derived from Qur’an, 45:24.

Ibn Taymiyyah mentions that most of the theologians, among them Baqillani, consider the Dahriyyah to be those who both deny the existence of God and claim pre-eternity of the universe, not mentioning any group which affirms the existence of God but claiming pre-eternity of the universe. He then mentions that some, such as, Razi, sub-divide the Dahriyyah further, apparently because of their awareness that the peripatetics, followers of Aristotle, do indeed hold the latter belief. According to Ibn Taymiyyah, atheism is the belief of the Samnites, who debated Jahm ibn Safwan. [BTJ, 1/139-140]

³⁹ Ibn Taymiyyah does not concede that the argument cited inevitably implies belief in the pre-eternity of the universe. Moreover, he continues, the belief in God’s highness is so intuitively certain that it is not permissible to abandon it on the basis that someone uses it to imply belief in the pre-eternity of the universe. He also ventures that the fact that one finds oneself unable to defeat a particular argument for the pre-eternity of the universe does not imply that the universe is actually eternal. Furthermore, he says, one could maintain that a body is pre-existent without agreeing with the philosophers’ objectionable position, simply by claiming that God is a body (unlike bodies). Then, he turns the argument around, and says that attempting to refute the Dahriyyah by an unsound argument such as this is censurable, offends the sensibilities of the Muslim laity, and encourages the Dahriyyah. [BTJ, 1/112-118, 129]

It is not clear to me why Ibn Taymiyyah seems to dwell at length, and indeed apparently going to unreasonable lengths to refute one particular implication of Dahriyyah, which is not the one Razi is addressing.

as being characterized by location, yet they do not profess this. This refutation therefore applies to both groups. Or, if we say that the ruling of conjecture and imagination is definitely not acceptable in the essence of God (Exalted be He!) and His attributes, then at that point we say: the profession of the Mushabbihah, [that] every two beings must inevitably [be such] that one of them is situated within the other, or apart from it by direction, is an illusory, invalid profession, and the profession of the Dahriyyah⁴⁰, that the Creator's antecedence to the world must inevitably be by duration and time, is an illusory, invalid profession. This is [precisely] the profession of our colleagues, the Adherents of Unicity⁴¹ and Transcendence, who have detached the rulings of conjecture and imagination from the essence of God (Exalted be He!) and His attributes. And this is the correct approach and the straight path.

1.10

The tenth: Cognizance of the actions of God (Exalted be He!) and His attributes is closer to [the access of] intellects than cognizance of the essence of God (Exalted be He!). Further, the Mushabbihah concur with us that agree that cognizance of God's (Exalted be He!) actions and attributes is different from the rulings of the senses and imagination.⁴²

1.10.1 The substantiation of this concept in the actions of God (Exalted be He!) is from [various] angles:

i) [Creation *ex nihilo*]

The first of them: What we have witnessed is the changing of attributes⁴³, such as the transformation of water and dust into a plant, and the transformation of the plant into a part of the human body. As for the origination of essences initially, without any preceding matter or substance, it is something we have definitely not witnessed, nor do our conjecture and

⁴⁰ The Arabic here reads *دهري* (in the singular), but this is almost certainly a typographical or copyist error, for the plural form would match the plural used just above for the Mushabbihah.

⁴¹ Ibn Taymiyyah's observation (1/132), that Razi has used this term in imitation of the Mu'tazilah, is not unfounded, for it is known that the latter referred to themselves as the Adherents of Justice and Unicity. However, it is quite possible that Razi intended it rather to snub the Mu'tazilites, suggesting that it is not they but rather the Ash'arites who truly deserve this appellation.

⁴² Ibn Taymiyyah mentions the distinction he has made earlier, conceding that God's attributes and actions are without likeness, but that this does not imply that they contradict sense-experience or reason. He asserts that one may not claim that knowledge and intellect can comprehend an aspect of God's actions which the senses and imagination cannot because:

- i) When a person senses or imagines something, he attains thereby knowledge and ratiocination of things which he has not yet sensed or perceived. Thus, the two domains are interlinked. Furthermore, even if one were to concede they do not overlap, this does not imply that they contradict one another.
- ii) Every existent being can be perceived by the senses, and Razi himself has acknowledged this. [BTJ, 1/287-288]

⁴³ Ibn Taymiyyah points out that although Razi's general point is valid, he has been lax with theological terminology here; what is changing is not the attributes (accidents) themselves, but rather the bodies themselves. [BTJ, 1/289]

imagination judge it to be possible.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, we have conceded that [God] (Exalted be He!) is the originator of essences initially, without any preceding matter or substance.

ii) [The start of time]

The second of them: That we do not comprehend⁴⁵ the origination of something and its formation except in a specific time. Yet, we have ruled that time was definitely not originated within time.⁴⁶

iii) [A doer starting to do something without undergoing change]

The third of them: That we do not comprehend a doer acting after not having been acting, except on account of a change of state and substitution of attribute. Yet, we have acknowledged that [God] (Exalted be He!) is the Creator of the universe, [but] without [being subject to] any of that.⁴⁷

iv) [A doer doing something which neither procures any benefit for him nor wards off harm]

The fourth of them: That we do not comprehend a doer performing an action except for procuring a benefit or for warding off a harm. Yet, we have acknowledged that [God] (Exalted be He!) is the Creator of the universe, [but] not for any of [such reasons].⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Ibn Taymiyyah's response is that even in each of these examples, we see something coming into existence, which was previously neither existent nor concealed within the preceding entity, and this, along with contemplation and analogy, are sufficient to establish the possibility of origination of things we have not seen, for what we do not see of God's actions and attributes resembles what we do see. In fact, he says, the origination of complex beings, such as a live human, is more remarkable than the origination of simple, inert substances, even if the latter be originated from nothingness.

Even if one concedes that conjecture and imagination cannot attain that knowledge, it is sufficient that our senses and intellect can do so. Ibn Taymiyyah's claim is not the impossibility of something which conjecture and imagination deem impossible, but rather the impossibility of what the intuitive human disposition rules as such. [BTJ, 1/291-3]

⁴⁵ Ibn Taymiyyah rightly points out that Razi should have said "cannot imagine" here rather than "do not comprehend." [BTJ, 1/295]

⁴⁶ Ibn Taymiyyah's response is that establishing the existence of something which one cannot comprehend does not prove the existence of something which one's intellect knows to be non-existent. [BTJ, 1/295]

⁴⁷ Ibn Taymiyyah comments that, at most, Razi has established the existence of a doer with no parallel, and an action with no parallel, but that both sides already conceded this. He ventures that this being contrary to the senses and imagination is just like it being contrary to reason and knowledge. [BTJ, 1/302]

⁴⁸ In addition to the response mentioned above under the previous point, Ibn Taymiyyah mentions that God's being transcendent above need and weariness is something necessarily following from the necessary knowledge of God being Lord of the Universes. He also astutely detects and responds to what he feels might be an attempt by Razi to indirectly advance the Ash'ari doctrine of figurative interpretation of God's being pleased by certain actions. [BTJ, 1/304-6]

1.10.2 As for the substantiation of this concept in the attributes, it [too] is from [various] angles:

i) [A knower knowing unlimited things in detail all at once]

The first of them: That we do not comprehend an essence which is knowing of unlimited pieces of information in detail at once, and when we put our selves to test, we find them to be [such that] whenever they are occupied with recalling a particular piece of information, it is impossible for them, at that time, to recall another piece of information. Yet, notwithstanding that, we believe that God (Exalted be He!) is knowing of such pieces of information as are endless, in detail, and without any dubiousness or confusion arising for Him. Therefore, [God's] (Exalted be He!) being knowing of the all information is a matter contrary to the implication of conjecture and imagination.

ii) [A doer doing something without tools and without fatigue]

The second of them: That we see that everyone who performs an action must inevitably have an instrument and device, and that strenuous actions are a means for exhaustion and hardship for that doer. Yet, we believe that [God] (Exalted be He!) manages [everything] from the `Arsh⁴⁹ to the ground, although He is transcendent above hardship, weariness and exhaustion.

iii) [A seer or hearer who sees and hears everything]

The third of them: That we believe that [God] hears the voices of creation, from the `Arsh to the ground, and sees the small and large things above the strata of the highest heavens and beneath the lowest earths. It is known that mortal conjecture and human imagination fall short of acknowledging this being, and yet we believe that [God] (Exalted be He!) is thus.⁵⁰

So, it is established that conjecture and imagination fall short of cognizance of the actions of God (Glorious and Exalted be He!) and His attributes, and yet we nevertheless affirm the actions and the attributes, contrary to conjecture and imagination. It has [also] been established that cognizance of the quintessence of God is more exalted, majestic and obscure than cognizance of the essence of the attributes. So, since we detach conjecture and imagination from [our] cognizance of the attributes and actions, then it is more appropriate and proper that we detach them from [our] cognizance of the [Divine] essence.

⁴⁹ Often translated as Throne, but since the possible lexical implications are broader, I have chosen to leave it untranslated. See: Qurtubi's exegesis.

⁵⁰ Ibn Taymiyyah's response to this and the preceding two points is similar in nature. Once again, he points out that not only conjecture and imagination, but even intellect and knowledge do not encompass God. He also ventures that the fact that human beings know that they themselves vary in their faculties of sight, hearing, strength and knowledge actually makes it possible for one to conceive another being who has a greater capability in these domains than himself, and by progressive analogy, to comprehend God's capability. [BTJ, 1/306-8]

These ten evidences indicate that [God's] (Glorious and Exalted be He!) being transcendent above spatial location and direction is not a concept repudiated by pure intellect, and this is the fulfillment of what was sought. And success is with God.

We conclude this section by [mentioning] what is narrated about Aristotle, that he wrote, in the beginning of his book on divinity⁵¹, "He who intends to embark upon the divine sciences should create for himself a new instinct."⁵² The sheikh⁵³ (may God be pleased with him) said: This speech concurs with revelation and prophethood, for the levels of formation of the body are mentioned in [God's] (Exalted be He!) saying, [translated], "And surely We created mankind from a strain of clay,"⁵⁴ and then when the matter reaches [mention of] the conjunction of the soul with the body, He says, [translated], "Then We brought him into being as another creation."⁵⁵ This is like a notification of [the fact] that the conjunction of the soul with the body is not like the transformation of the drop [of fluid] from one state to another, but rather this is another type, different than those preceding types, and for this reason, He says, [translated], "Then We brought him forth as a new creation." Similarly, when the human being meditates upon the states of the lower and higher⁵⁶ bodies, and meditates upon their attributes, that [becomes] a canon for him. Then, when he wants to move on from there to cognizance of the Lordship, it is necessary for him to create for himself another instinct and another intellect, different than the intellect by which he has been guided to cognizance of the corporeals. This is the end of the discourse on this preliminary. And success is with God.

2. [It is not necessary that every existent being should have a parallel or likeness]

The Second Preliminary: That it is not necessary that every being have a parallel or likeness, and that negation of a parallel or likeness does not imply negation of that entity. This is indicated by [various] aspects:

2.1 [The intellect does not reject this.]

⁵¹ Presumably, this would be Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, but see the next note.

⁵² Ibn Taymiyyah charges that Razi has debased himself by quoting such "ignorant" and "errant" words, which cannot even be decisively attributed to Aristotle. He laments the fact that Razi could not find anything suitable to quote from any of the Prophets rather than from someone who (by Razi's own admission in his *al-Matalib al-'Aliyah*) is so inept in matters of the divine. He launches into a brief critique of Aristotle, and how he is charged with distorting the faith of the Sabians, with the result that this group ended up with greater divergence from revealed truths than even the Jews and Christians who distorted their revelations. He further ventures that Razi and others of his ilk are attempting to corrupt Islam just like Aristotle corrupted Sabianism. Even if the statement were authentically transmitted from Aristotle, it must be taken as [BTJ, 1/369-377]

⁵³ The "sheikh" is undoubtedly Razi, these being the words of a scribe or copyist.

⁵⁴ Qur'an, 23:12.

⁵⁵ Qur'an, 23:14.

⁵⁶ i.e. terrestrial and celestial.

The first proof: That the intuitive intellect does not consider far-fetched the existence of a being described by specific attributes, such that everything other than it differs from it in that specificity. If this is not repudiated by the intuitive intellect, then we know that the non-existence of a parallel to something does not imply the non-existence of that entity.

2.2 [The existence of something cannot be conditional on the existence of something resembling it.]

The second proof: is that the existence of something is either conditional upon the existence of something resembling it, or it is not conditional [on that]. The first [possibility] is invalid, because if the two things resembled each other, it would be necessary for them to be equal in all the requisites. Thus, the dependence of the existence of the former upon the existence of the latter would necessitate the dependence of the existence of the latter upon the existence of the former. Nay, [it would imply even] the dependence of each one upon itself. This is impossible according to the intuitive intellect, and so it is established that the existence of something is not conditional on the existence of a parallel, and thus negation of the parallel does not necessitate the negation of [the entity itself].

2.3 [That the identification of something as itself is impossible to achieve in something else.]

The third proof: is that the identification of something as itself is impossible to reach in [something] other than it, otherwise that thing would be precisely another, which is invalid in the intuitive intellect. So, it is established that the identification of something as itself is impossible to reach in [something] other than it. We know, [further,] that the non-existence of a parallel or equal [to an entity] does not necessitate the non-existence of the entity.

Thus becomes apparent the unsoundness of the declaration of those who profess that it is not possible for us – unless we find a parallel for it – to comprehend the existence of a being that is neither continuous with the world nor separate from it, for according to us, the being described by this attribute is only God (Exalted be He!), and we have explained that the non-existence of a parallel or likeness [to an entity] does not necessitate the non-existence of the entity. Thus it is established that this utterance [of the opponents] has totally fallen [from repute].

3. [The spectrum of views amongst the corporealists]⁵⁷

The Third Preliminary: Know that those who declare that [God] (Exalted be He!) is a body have disagreed [thereafter]:

Some of them say: He is in the form of a human. Then [they differed]. What is transmitted from the Mushabbihah of this *ummah* is that He is in the form of a human young man⁵⁸, while [what

⁵⁷ For other discussions on the Mushabbihah and corporealists, see: FBF, 225-230 and BTJ, 1/51-54. Both Baghdadi and Ibn Taymiyyah assert that these beliefs originated amongst some of the Rafidites and Mu'tazilites. Baghdadi divides the Mushabbihah into those that liken God's essence to created essences, and those that liken His attributes.

is transmitted] from the Mushabbihah of the Jews⁵⁹ is that He is in the form of an old man. They do not admit movement, going and coming as possible for God (Exalted be He!). As for the verifying scholars of the Mushabbihah, that which is transmitted from them is that He (Exalted be He!) is in the form of a light among the lights.⁶⁰

Abu Ma'shar, the astrologer,⁶¹ mentioned that the reason for people advancing to take idol worship as a religion is that people in more ancient time followed the belief of the Mushabbihah, and they used to believe that the God of the universe is a great light. When they believed that, they took [for themselves] an idol which was the biggest idol in the [purported] form of God, and other idols, smaller than that, in the forms of the angels. They became occupied with the worship of these idols believing that they were worshipping God and the angels. It is thus established that the religion of idol worship is an offshoot from the belief of the Mushabbihah.

Know that many of these refrain from [declaring] the possibility of movement and sedentariness for God (Exalted be He!). As for the Karramites, they do not profess [a belief of] organs and limbs. Rather, they say that He is exclusively above the `Arsh. Then, these beliefs admit to three possibilities, for He (Exalted be He!) could be said to be either in contact with the `Arsh, or it could be said that He is apart from it with a bounded distance, or it could be said that He is apart from it with an unbounded distance.⁶² To each of these three [possibilities] a group of the Karramiyyah has subscribed.

They also disagreed concerning whether He (Exalted be He!) is exclusive to that direction by His essence, or by virtue of a pre-eternal concept. There is disagreement amongst them on this.

This is the completion of the discussion of the preliminaries. And with God is success.

⁵⁸ See Ibn al-Jawzi's works KAS and DST for some of the unsound hadith drawn upon by these Mushabbihah.

⁵⁹ Gimaret mentions that rabbinic Judaism, in the 3rd Hijri century, had taken an anthropomorphic stance, while Alexandrian Judaism had adopted a figurative approach. [DIDH, 27]. Caird mentions that the tendency to avoid expressions which would be derogatory to God, appeared around the 7th century BCE. [LIB, 176]

⁶⁰ Baghdadadi attributes to the Hishamiyyah the belief that God is a luminous body like a round pearl. [FBF, 227]

⁶¹ Al-Munajjim apparently not merely a *laqab*, but refers to Abu Mas'ar being an astrologer. Razi's choice of sources here once again drew Ibn Taymiyyah's rebuke.

⁶² Ibn Taymiyyah mentions the first and second of these views as a single view, professed by most of the Karramites, and the third view – which he observes to be unintelligible – being that professed by the Haysamite Karramites. [DTAN, 6/10-11]

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